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Thematic evaluation of monitoring and evaluation of the Millennium Development Goals: lessons learned for the post-2015 era

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

Building upon the adoption in 2000 of the United Nations Millennium Declaration, the Millennium Development Goals arose as a specific set of goals and targets for progress against global challenges, to be achieved by 2015.

The present thematic evaluation report describes the framework of monitoring and evaluation arrangements that pertain to the Millennium Development Goals and extracts lessons that may be applicable to monitoring and evaluation in the post-2015 era.

What is loosely referred to as the Millennium Development Goals monitoring and evaluation framework consists of a variety of monitoring components which have evolved over time, without a provision for rigorous evaluation. While the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Millennium Development Goal Indicators played an important consolidating role in the statistical arena, one key lesson learned is that the post-2015 sustainable development goals, which are under final negotiation, would benefit from a clear, overarching framework of monitoring and evaluation objectives, role/responsibility definitions and coordination mechanisms being established from the outset. Another key lesson relates to the need for a strategy that addresses multilateral and bilateral support for national capacity development, *including the mobilization of* sufficient resources.

* E/AC.51/2015/1.

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In looking forward towards a prospective monitoring and evaluation framework for the sustainable development goals, a multi-tiered system linking country, regional and global levels will be needed. Evaluation, if strategically planned, has the potential to serve as a bridge between monitoring and accountability at key levels and junctures of deliberation and decision-making by stakeholders. This will enhance decision makers' ability to make necessary improvements and mid-course corrections at the respective national, regional and global levels.

In this regard, the Office of Internal Oversight Services makes one recommendation for consideration, namely, that the Secretary-General formulate an overarching strategy and action plan to support coherent, coordinated and timely monitoring and evaluation, together with relevant capacity development needed to support decision-making, along the path to the achievement of the sustainable development goals.

discussion forums.[15] Consultations in all five regions concluded that, while the backbone of an accountability framework must be at the national level, the United Nations regional commissions should "support ... linking national and global efforts, as well as ... provide a platform [through the regional forums for sustainable development] for collective multi-stakeholder review of regional progress on the post-2015 development agenda, based on national assessments of progress".[16]

Lesson 3: A group that functions like the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Millennium Development Goal Indicators can play an important expert and consolidating role with regard to development goal indicators

36. With regard to the technical specification and monitoring of indicators, the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Millennium Development Goal Indicators, led by the Statistics Division, came into existence in 2002. A review of OIOS documents and data from interviewees indicate that it has played an important role in preparing the data and analysis for the monitoring of progress on the Goals. At the same time, despite efforts to ensure optimal coverage and review of all Goal indicators, interviewees had differing views on the extent to which the monitoring responsibilities of different United Nations entities have been clear.

37. With regard to the post-2015 era, a review of OIOS documents and data from interviewees indicate the need for a group that fills the role that the Inter-agency and Expert Group has performed. At the same time, as the present report indicates in a number of other sections, there is a need for joint work and coordination at a number of additional levels, such as with regard to comprehensive evaluation and regional coherence.

Lesson 4: Monitoring activities need to be sufficient in terms of coverage, disaggregation of data and timeliness

38. As emphasized in the report of the Secretary-General's Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development, "data are the lifeblood of decision-making and the raw material for accountability. Without high-quality data providing the right information on the right things at the right time, designing, monitoring and evaluating effective policies becomes almost impossible".[17]

39. At the country level, according to a report of the Secretary-General containing an analysis of a subset of 22 Millennium Development Goal indicators (E/CN.3/2014/29), the number of developing countries that had two or more data points for 16 or more of the 22 indicators rose from 4 in 2003 to 129 in 2013. However, gaps remain with regard to important basic data, such as the number of births and deaths. At present, only 11 per cent of developing countries have produced data on maternal mortality. A second major lacuna is missing

[15] See the summaries of the chairs of the regional consultations, available from www.regionalcommissions.org/?p=915 accessed 3 March 2015.

[16] See the synthesis report of the regional consultations on monitoring and accountability, entitled "Towards an effective monitoring and accountability framework for the post-2015 development agenda: perspectives from the regions", 8 October 2013.

[17] A World That Counts: Mobilizing the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development, November 2014, executive summary.

I. Introduction

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) identified a thematic evaluation of the framework for monitoring and evaluating progress on the Millennium Development Goals on the basis of a risk assessment undertaken in early 2013. The Committee for Programme and Coordination selected the evaluation for consideration at its fifty-fifth session, in 2015.[1]

2. OIOS evaluations are undertaken further to Article 97 of the Charter of the United Nations and General Assembly resolutions 48/218 B, 54/244 and 59/272, as well as the Secretary-General's bulletin on the establishment of the Office (ST/SGB/273), which authorizes OIOS to initiate, carry out and report on any action that it considers necessary to fulfil its responsibilities. The general frame of reference for OIOS is provided in the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (ST/SGB/2000/8, regulation 7.1).

II. Background

Millennium Development Goals

3. Building upon two decades of high-level United Nations conferences and summits, world leaders came together at United Nations Headquarters in New York on 8 September 2000 to adopt the United Nations Millennium Declaration.[2] They committed to a new global partnership to reduce extreme poverty, hunger, illiteracy and disease, and reaffirmed the global commitment to solidarity, equality, dignity and respect for nature as the core values underlining global policy action. The Millennium Development Goals, a set of specific goals and targets to be achieved by 2015, were introduced as a means to galvanize efforts to focus the world's attention on halving extreme poverty and promoting human development. Figure I below illustrates progress made in achieving selected Millennium Development Goal targets.[3]

[1] See General Assembly resolution 68/20.

[2] General Assembly resolution 55/2.

[3] For a full list of the Millennium Development Goals, targets and indicators, see A/69/1, annex.

disaggregated data[18] that can identify gender, wealth quintile, age, disability, population group and localized inequalities. In the OIOS survey of Inter-agency and Expert Group members, over half of respondents disagreed somewhat (41 per cent) or strongly (18 per cent) with the statement that the Millennium Development Goals monitoring and evaluation framework had supported strong incorporation of disaggregated data. Time lags are a third weakness: for example, significant time lags are associated with extreme income-poverty data. Lastly, with respect to global and national figures, problems remain as a result of inconsistent methods for the collection, processing and validation of data, including the treatment of missing values.

40. According to the report of the Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development, although data availability is still considered poor (for example, there has been no five-year period during which availability was more than 70 per cent of what was required), it has improved overall. Testimony from members of the United Nations System Task Team on the Post-2015 Development Agenda suggests that there has been some improvement in data availability where Millennium Development Goal indicators were initially poorly formulated (initial data were sparse or missing), for example, regarding violence against women and maternal mortality; however, there is still room for improvement.

41. Validation work has been undertaken by the Inter-agency and Expert Group, regional commissions, Member States and others. However, OIOS survey respondents expressed the view that the Millennium Development Goals monitoring and evaluation framework has allowed for stronger data validation at the global level than at the regional and country levels, leading to some discrepancies between data sets; discrepancies continue to create some tensions and impede consistent comparison, as well as effective evidence-based decision-making, even at the global level.

42. In the post-2015 era, as additional flexibility and reliance on national-level statistics are likely to be sought, challenges related to insufficiently disaggregated and validated data are likely to grow if they go unaddressed.

Lesson 5: A fully developed strategy to support national statistical, monitoring and evaluation capacity development needs to be in place; the strategy needs to include multilateral and bilateral support as well as a resource mobilization plan

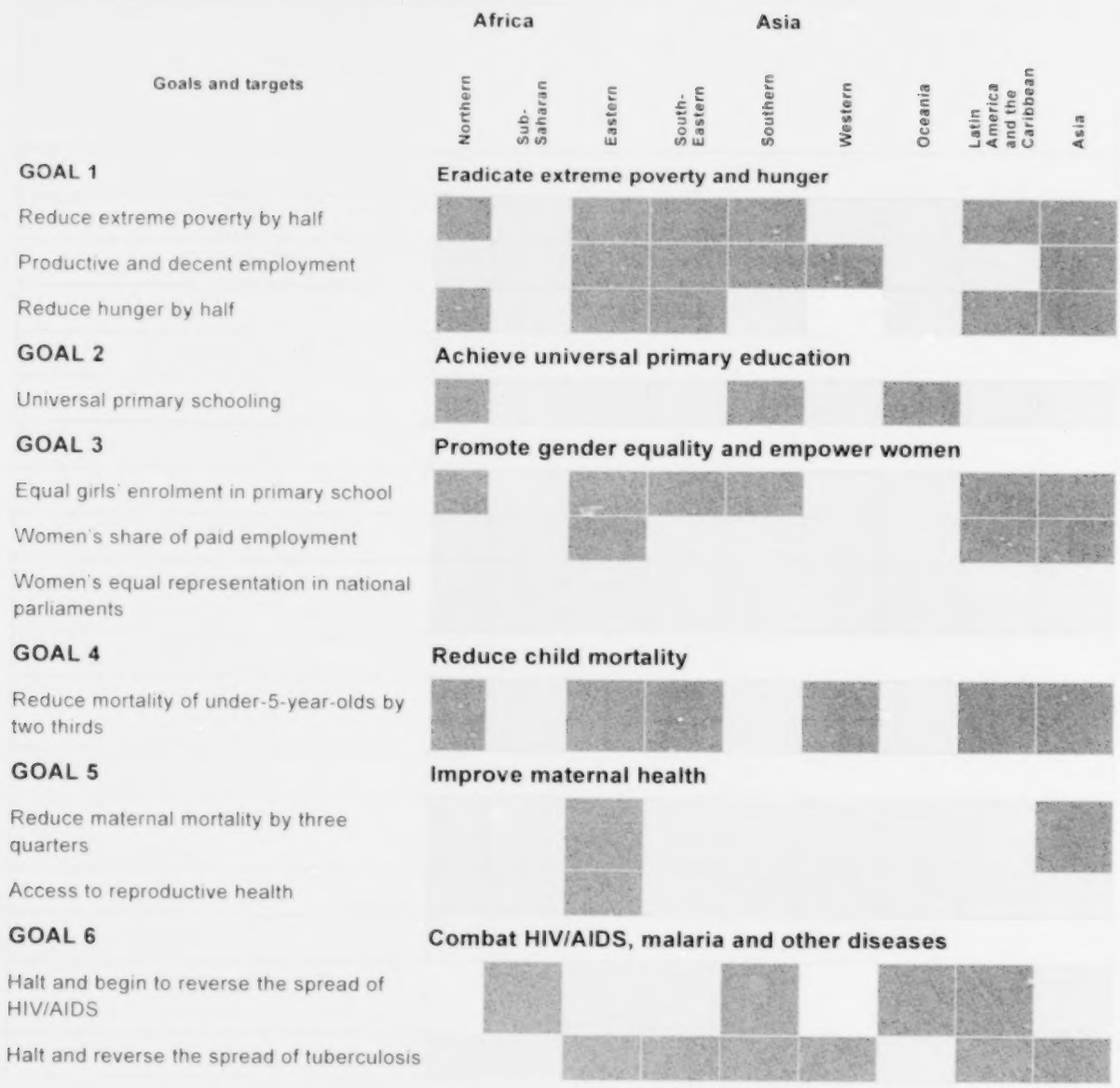
43. Related to the challenges outlined in lesson 4 are Millennium Development Goals-related lessons regarding the assignment of responsibilities for data collection. Recognizing the variance in measurability and availability of historical data among Millennium Development Goal indicators and countries, the Secretary-General's road map underscored the need to assist in building national capacity (see A/56/326, annex). Member States subsequently reiterated the need to increase efforts in support of statistical capacity-building in developing countries.[19]

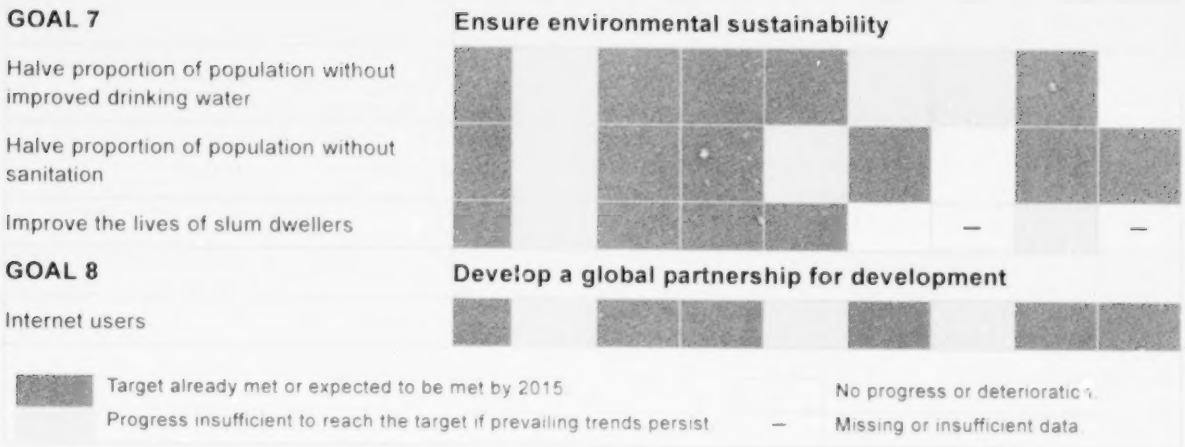
44. According to the report of the United Nations System Task Team on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, entitled "Statistics and indicators for the post-2015

[18] See, for example, "Towards an effective monitoring and accountability framework" at note 16 above.

[19] See General Assembly resolution 65/1.

Figure I
Millennium Development Goals: 2014 progress chart[1]




GOAL 7
Ensure environmental sustainability
Halve proportion of population without improved drinking water
Halve proportion of population without sanitation
Improve the lives of slum dwellers
GOAL 8
Develop a global partnership for development
Internet users
Target already met or expected to be met by 2015
Progress insufficient to reach the target if prevailing trends persist
No progress or deterioration
Missing or insufficient data

[a] Chart compiled by the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. OIOS altered the presentation to convert from a colour to a black-grey-white scale; no significant substantive changes were made. The chart provides an assessment of progress on selected key targets relating to each goal. Trends are measured on the basis of information available as of June 2014.

4. As indicated in the *United Nations Millennium Development Goals Report 2014*, the latest to be published, the combined efforts of Governments, the international community, civil society and the private sector have resulted in significant progress since 1990. For example, the global aggregate number of people living in extreme poverty was reduced by 700 million, substantial gains have been made towards reaching gender parity in school enrolment at all levels of education and the target of halving the proportion of people without access to an improved water source was achieved five years ahead of schedule, in 2010.

Post-2015 development agenda

5. Discussions on the post-2015 development agenda are rooted in outcomes of multiple conferences, including the 2010 Summit on the Millennium Development Goals and the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012, at which the outcome document entitled "The future we want" was adopted (see A/69/700, paras. 26 and 27). Throughout 2013 and 2014, Member States deliberated in various forums, including the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals, established by the Assembly by its decision 67/555 in January 2013, which held its first session on 14 and 15 March 2013.

6. Some of the inputs to the consultations for formulating the post-2015 agenda have been provided by the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing and the Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development. The Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Post-2015 Development Planning plays a key advisory and coordination role. The United Nations regional commissions have led accountability consultations in each of the five regions. Moreover, inputs from the public have been harnessed through over 90 national and 11 global thematic consultations led by the United Nations Development Group. A public online survey platform, MY

World, sought opinions on priority issues and received over 7 million votes from all regions.[4]

7. In July 2014, the Open Working Group proposed 17 specific goals with 169 associated targets (see A/69/700, para. 44, and A/68/970 and Corr.1, para. 18). In September 2014, the President of the General Assembly convened a high-level stocktaking event on the post-2015 development agenda. Subsequently, in December 2014, the Secretary-General presented his synthesis report on the post-2015 development agenda, entitled "The road to dignity by 2030: ending poverty, transforming all lives and protecting the planet" (A/69/700), in advance of upcoming intergovernmental negotiations.[5] Six essential elements were proposed: dignity, people, prosperity, planet, justice and partnership. Following a proposal by the President of the General-Assembly, Member States have agreed on the modalities for the process of final negotiations and preparation of the document to be considered at the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda, to be held in September 2015. The modalities stated, "the proposal of the Open Working Group shall be the main basis for integrating sustainable development goals into the post-2015 development agenda, while recognizing that other inputs will also be considered".[6] Substantive consultations began in January 2015.

Monitoring and evaluation framework

8. Monitoring and evaluation are related, complementary functions, intended to provide evidential inputs for multiple junctures of decision-making. Monitoring and evaluation is successful when it facilitates and informs evidence-based decision-making in the various arenas that apply. While Member States serving on intergovernmental bodies have supreme authority, monitoring and evaluation also must serve the different needs of extrabudgetary donors, department heads/programme managers, counterparts in national technical ministries, civil society and representatives of intended beneficiaries at the country level.

9. For the purposes of the present evaluation, monitoring is defined as involving regular tracking and reporting on facts, usually in a quantitative manner, with respect to both operational activity and socioeconomic phenomena, as they correlate with progress against policy, programme or project objectives.

10. Raw monitoring data and statistical analysis are the necessary, but insufficient, inputs into decision-making about mid-course corrections to global or national policy, programmes or development projects. To be meaningful, such data need to be complemented by periodic analysis of the underlying causes of monitored changes. Evaluation is then a time-bound exercise with the objective of systematic determination of the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of policies, programmes or projects, thus serving the twin purposes of lesson-learning for programme improvement, as well as providing for accountability (see A/68/70). Evaluation seeks to identify root causes by answering three questions: Are we doing the right things? Are we doing them right? Are we doing them on a sufficient scale to make a difference?

[4] MY World Survey, www.myworld2015.org/ accessed 9 February 2015.
[5] See General Assembly decision 69/550.
[6] See General Assembly resolution 68/309.

time, technological evolution is permitting new types and means of data capture and analysis. This will transform the landscape of data availability up to 2030. As noted by the High-level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, "the revolution in information technology over the last decade provides an opportunity to strengthen data and statistics for accountability and decision-making purposes",[30] and the Secretary-General's Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development highlighted both challenges and opportunities in improving data to monitor sustainable development.[31] The onus for monitoring and evaluation does not rest solely on the United Nations system; different stakeholders (for example, Governments, the private sector, NGOs and academia) have different roles. Nevertheless, in its report, the Independent Expert Advisory Group called upon the United Nations to take a lead role in mobilizing, enabling and coordinating diverse actors, encouraging good practice and supporting the mobilization of necessary funding.[32]

49. To track and achieve the sustainable development goals, the Independent Expert Advisory Group urges Member States and United Nations system entities to implement a comprehensive programme of action in four areas: principles and standards; technology, innovation and analysis; capacity and resources; and leadership and governance. This was echoed by the Secretary-General in the synthesis report, in which he called for a United Nations-led "global partnership for sustainable development data" (see A/69/700, para. 144).

Lesson 7: Provision for rigorous evaluation of the achievement of progress is needed

50. Another condition necessary for effective monitoring and evaluation relates to the presence of quality assurance and mechanisms of accountability and oversight. Evaluation is one tool for testing assumptions and determining effectiveness in the achievement of desired outcomes and impacts, and for guiding the need for mid-course corrections.

51. While some qualitative reporting has been included in the global progress reports of the Secretary-General and the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Millennium Development Goal Indicators, OIOS identified a significant gap when it came to the implementation of coordinated, formal, rigorous evaluation of the achievement of progress towards the Goals.

52. In contrast to monitoring, the intergovernmental process for following up on the United Nations Millennium Declaration did not envision an evaluation framework, nor did the United Nations system actors themselves define roles and responsibilities or establish arrangements that permitted systematic, coordinated evaluation of progress on the Goals and the building of evaluation capacities. An OIOS survey respondent, citing the view of other respondents and interviewees, noted that "the framework is strongly biased in favour of monitoring and less on evaluation".

53. With the Millennium Development Goals having served as the central rationale for official development assistance at large during the past decade and a half, it can

[30] A New Global Partnership, ibid., p. 23.
[31] A World that Counts; see note 17 above.
[32] Ibid.

Conditions necessary for effective monitoring and evaluation

11. The following conditions are necessary for effective monitoring and evaluation (see, for example, A/63/268):

(a) A clear and logical hierarchy of objectives;

(b) Identification of indicators or metrics of observation;

(c) Assignment of responsibilities for data collection;

(d) Responsiveness to requests for useful information which can inform decision-making on performance improvement;

(e) Presence of quality assurance and mechanisms of accountability and oversight.

12. In line with the above, the enterprise of monitoring and evaluation of the Millennium Development Goals can be described through a "thematic impact pathway" that embeds these five conditions. Evaluation, then, is the evidence-based tool which enables one to test the assumptions of causal relationships that apply to translating efforts into desired outcomes and impacts.

Scope, logical framework and thematic impact pathway of the evaluation

13. The overarching purpose of the present thematic evaluation was to identify lessons learned from monitoring and evaluation of the Millennium Development Goals that may be applicable to monitoring and evaluation in the post-2015 era. To facilitate these analyses, OIOS developed the thematic impact pathway set out in figure II below.

be no surprise that the quest for demonstrating value added towards progress on the Goals has been the source and perspective that has animated much desire for inquiry across the spectrum of policy-, programme- and project-level development cooperation, whether or not such activity was originally inspired or informed by the Goals.

54. A scan of OIOS literature yielded a wide canvas of sources for Millennium Development Goals-related evaluations. Nevertheless, it proved very challenging to access Millennium Development Goal evaluations in a meaningful, systematic or digestible manner. To begin with, what appropriately to count as evaluation is itself a matter for possible debate. "Evaluation" may range from large, formally staged independent evaluations, be they at the policy, programme or project level, to informal, internally managed reviews that are evaluative in purpose and character but not circumscribed by the rigour and methodology of the professional evaluation community (for example, as embedded in the norms and standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group). There is no central or coordinated repository for Millennium Development Goals evaluations, but a variety of "evaluations" are located in numerous and disparate places, accessible on the websites or portals of, for example, the following entities:

- More than 22 different providers of data to, as well as a number of additional members of the Inter-agency Expert Group[33]
- United Nations Evaluation Group
- Other entities with related initiatives such as the Millennium Project and the Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund
- Oversight entities such as OIOS (see E/AC.51/2006/2) and the Joint Inspection Unit

55. It is illustrative that a simple search of the United Nation's public website for "Millennium Development Goals evaluation" yielded 103,410 entries.[34] Meanwhile, a search for Millennium Development Goals evaluations on the United Nations Evaluation Group's database of evaluation reports, which invites all United Nations organizations to self-report evaluations, yields 100 reports, out of the 3,000 evaluations in the database.[35] The UNDP database of evaluations, on the other hand, includes 898 evaluations related to the Millennium Development Goals that range from small project evaluations to complex policy evaluations.[36] While many reports referring to work towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals were identified, no meta-analytical evaluations or comprehensive evaluations were found that provided an integrated picture that could have informed policy and mid-course correction.

56. In the post-2015 era, monitoring indicators will not be enough: ensuring adequate evaluation capacities will also be needed. Multiple United Nations resolutions call for further monitoring and evaluation, including, most recently,

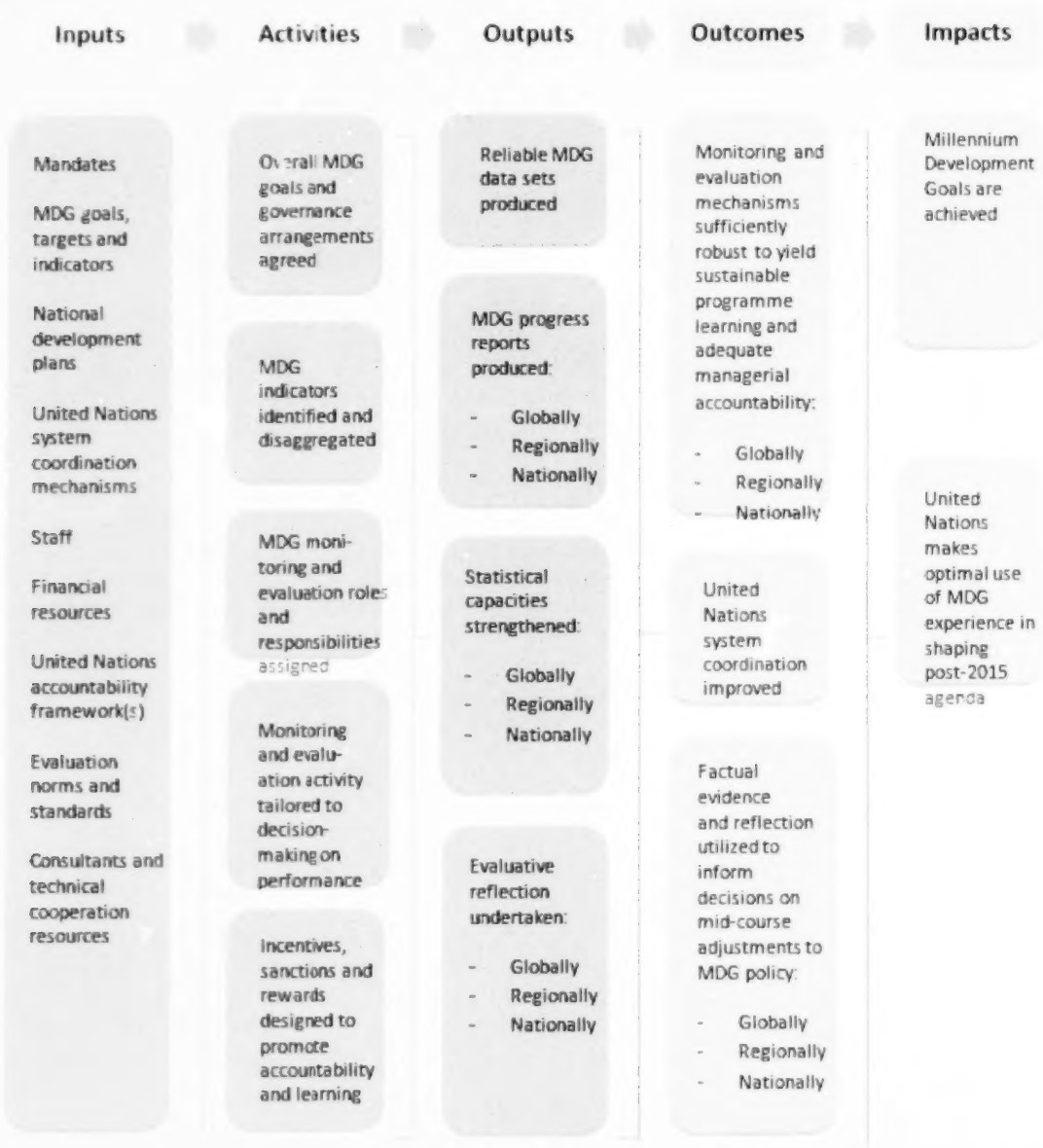
[33] Those data providers as referred to on the website of the Inter-agency and Expert Group, http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Host.aspx?Content=Products/Links.htm accessed 6 January 2015.

[34] www.un.org, 3 February 2015.

[35] United Nations Evaluation Group, Database of Evaluation Reports, www.uneval.org/evaluation/reports, December 2014.

[36] UNDP Evaluation Resource Centre database, http://erc.undp.org/index.html, December 2014.

Figure II
Thematic impact pathway: monitoring and evaluation of the Millennium Development Goals


Inputs
Activities
Outputs
Outcomes
Impacts
Mandates
MDG goals, targets and indicators
National development plans
United Nations system coordination mechanisms
Staff
Financial resources
United Nations accountability framework(s)
Evaluation norms and standards
Consultants and technical cooperation resources
Overall MDG goals and governance arrangements agreed
MDG indicators identified and disaggregated
MDG monitoring and evaluation roles and responsibilities assigned
Monitoring and evaluation activity tailored to decision-making on performance
Incentives, sanctions and rewards designed to promote accountability and learning
Reliable MDG data sets produced
MDG progress reports produced:
- Globally
- Regionally
- Nationally
Statistical capacities strengthened:
- Globally
- Regionally
- Nationally
Evaluative reflection undertaken:
- Globally
- Regionally
- Nationally
Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms sufficiently robust to yield sustainable programme learning and adequate managerial accountability:
- Globally
- Regionally
- Nationally
United Nations system coordination improved
Factual evidence and reflection utilized to inform decisions on mid-course adjustments to MDG policy:
- Globally
- Regionally
- Nationally
Millennium Development Goals are achieved
United Nations makes optimal use of MDG experience in shaping post-2015 agenda

14. The pathway is based on United Nations Evaluation Group principles and relevant United Nations documentation, and depicts the relationships between inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impact. It provided the OIOS evaluation team with a lens to view how activities were, or were not, interconnected; it also

served as an analytical foundation for assessing the contribution of Millennium Development Goals monitoring and evaluation activities and outputs.

15. The evaluation objective described above and associated evaluation questions focused primarily on Secretariat-based activities, with analysis, as appropriate, of linkages to system-wide activities. For example, while global and regional monitoring and evaluation of progress towards the Millennium Development Goals was analysed, including how national-level reporting has fed into global reporting, individual country-level monitoring efforts were not subject to assessment by OIOS. (This focus complements a recent evaluation undertaken by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) that seeks to assess the contributions of UNDP in supporting country-based progress on the Goals.)

16. Key evaluation questions, in accordance with the inception paper/terms of reference (IED-14-006), include:

- What roles has the United Nations performed in the monitoring and evaluation of progress towards the Millennium Development Goals?
- To what extent have Millennium Development Goals monitoring and evaluation activities been linked and coordinated between the global, regional and national levels?
- What Millennium Development Goals monitoring and evaluation challenges/opportunities and good practices will be applicable to maximize the contribution of monitoring and evaluation functions in support of the post-2015 development agenda?

17. Evaluation results in the present report are classified in line with the conditions outlined in paragraph 11, which are embedded in the thematic impact pathway set out in figure II.

Evaluation methodology

18. Data collection was undertaken between May and December 2014. OIOS performed a comprehensive review of documentation related to the monitoring and evaluation of progress on the Millennium Development Goals and the post-2015 development agenda. A number of intergovernmental and other meetings were observed and interviews conducted with key stakeholders. During preliminary data collection, OIOS identified the lack of a formal framework for monitoring and evaluation of the Goals; a descriptive mapping of the key entities involved, their roles and key monitoring and evaluation outputs was therefore undertaken.

19. The analysis contained in the present evaluation report is derived from triangulation of documentary, testimonial, observational and evidential sources collected through quantitative and qualitative methods, including the following:

(a) **Document reviews and analysis of quantitative data.** OIOS reviewed mandates, reports and documentation associated with the monitoring and evaluation of progress on the Millennium Development Goals, as well as the process aimed at developing an accountability framework for the post-2015 era;

(b) **Inter-agency and Expert Group on Millennium Development Goal Indicators survey.** A self-administered web-based survey was administered to

70 members of the Inter-agency and Expert Group[7] to gain perspectives and lessons learned by the Group, which is mandated by the Statistical Commission to compile monitoring data on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals;

(c) **Interviews and observation of meetings.** Sixty semi-structured, primarily in-person, interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of United Nations system entity, government and non-governmental organization (NGO) stakeholders. OIOS observed a variety of intergovernmental and other decision-making forums where monitoring and evaluation discussions were considered;

(d) **Field missions for data collection and observation.** To gain perspectives at all levels, missions were undertaken to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE); to the United Republic of Tanzania, where the evaluation team met with the United Nations country team and governmental and non-governmental organizations; and to Paris, to meet with the secretariat of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21).[8]

Challenges and limitations

20. The scope of the thematic evaluation did not include the statistical validation of data monitoring progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. That has been covered, to some extent, by recent OIOS-Internal Audit Division audits pertaining to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the regional commissions.

III. Evaluation results

21. OIOS identified eight lessons learned; they emanate from a review of the conditions and presumed causal pattern of effective monitoring and evaluation as projected through the thematic impact pathway. Their presentation below is organized in line with the related conditions set forth in paragraph 11 above. Lesson 1 includes a description of the current Millennium Development Goals monitoring and evaluation framework.

Lesson 1: The United Nations system Millennium Development Goals monitoring and evaluation framework consists of a variety of components which have evolved over time

22. The report of the Secretary-General entitled "Road map towards the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration" stated that "the United Nations system, in cooperation with other partners in development, will monitor goals that are directly related to development and poverty eradication" (see A/56/326, para. 83) and that "the United Nations will report on progress towards the Millennium Development Goals at the global and country levels, coordinated by the

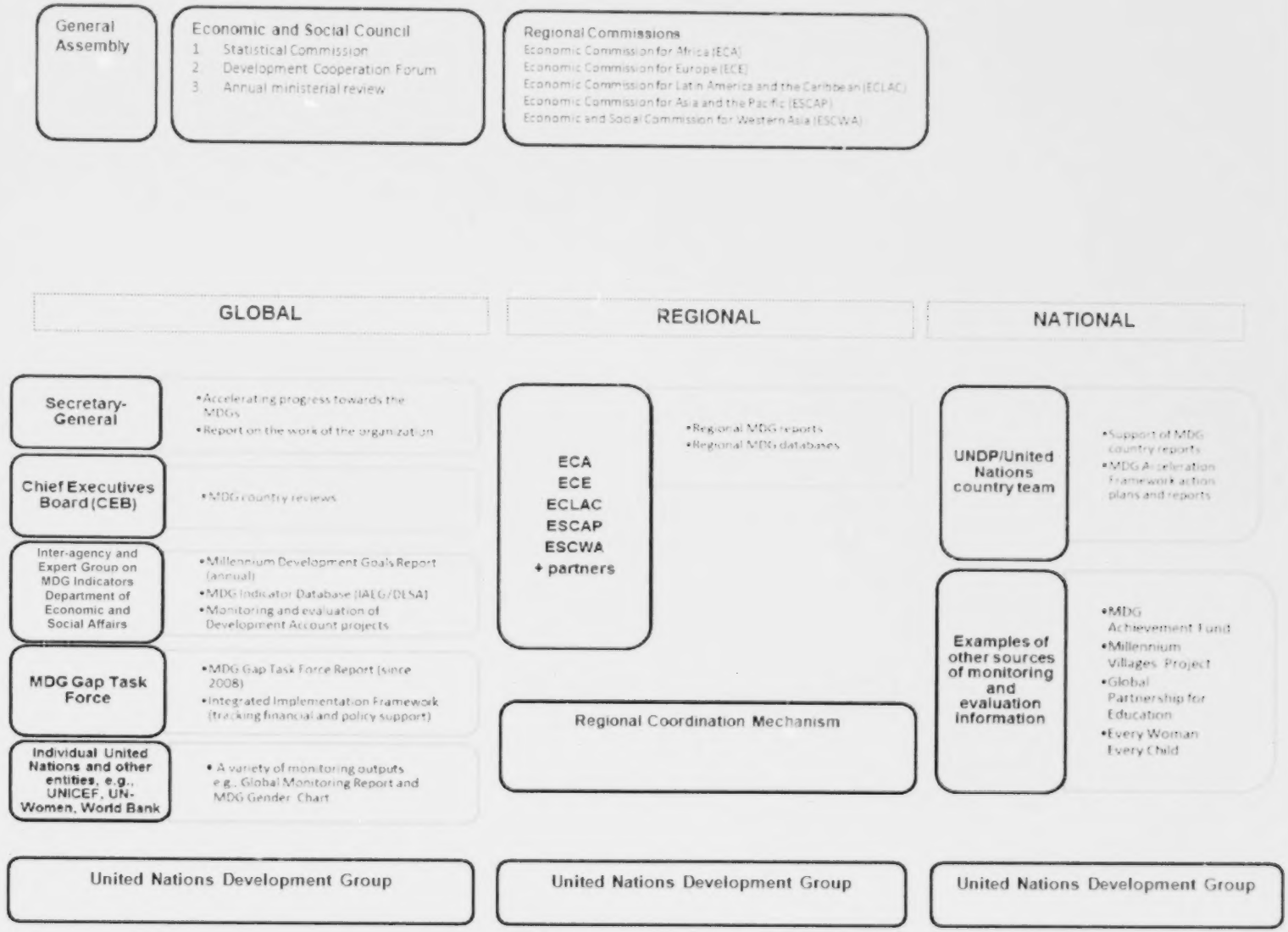
[7] The response rate was 51 per cent.

[8] Throughout the evaluation process OIOS sought inputs from three primary focal points (Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Post-2015 Development Planning, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the secretariat of the Chief Executives Board for Coordination), as well as over 30 secondary focal points.

Department of Economic and Social Affairs ... and UNDP, respectively" (ibid., para. 4). Figure III below outlines the key global, regional and national components of the framework as it stands today, on the basis of OIOS analysis. It highlights the main categories of United Nations system actors engaged in Millennium Development Goals monitoring and evaluation at the global, regional and national levels as well as associated outputs. OIOS is not aware of any prior attempt to map the disparate Millennium Development Goals monitoring and evaluation components outlined in figure III.

Figure III

Map of the United Nations system framework for monitoring and evaluation of progress towards the Millennium Development Goals — Overview


General Assembly
Economic and Social Council
1. Statistical Commission
2. Development Cooperation Forum
3. Annual ministerial review
Regional Commissions
Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)
Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)
Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)
Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)
GLOBAL
REGIONAL
NATIONAL
Secretary-General
•Accelerating progress towards the MDGs
•Report on the work of the organization
Chief Executives Board (CEB)
•MDG country reviews
Inter-agency and Expert Group on MDG Indicators Department of Economic and Social Affairs
•Millennium Development Goals Report (annual)
•MDG Indicator Database (IAEG/DESA)
•Monitoring and evaluation of Development Account projects
MDG Gap Task Force
•MDG Gap Task Force Report (since 2008)
•Integrated Implementation Framework (tracking financial and policy support)
Individual United Nations and other entities, e.g., UNICEF, UN-Women, World Bank
• A variety of monitoring outputs e.g., Global Monitoring Report and MDG Gender Chart
ECA
ECE
ECLAC
ESCAP
ESCWA
+ partners
•Regional MDG reports
•Regional MDG databases
Regional Coordination Mechanism
UNDP/United Nations country team
•Support of MDG country reports
•MDG Acceleration Framework action plans and reports
Examples of other sources of monitoring and evaluation information
•MDG Achievement Fund
•Millennium Villages Project
•Global Partnership for Education
•Every Woman Every Child
United Nations Development Group
United Nations Development Group
United Nations Development Group

Global and system-wide coordination and review components

23. The Economic and Social Council annual ministerial review and the Development Cooperation Forum, mandated at the 2005 World Summit, have assessed the progress made in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and the other goals and targets agreed at the major United Nations conferences and summits over the past 15 years.[9] These have served as platforms for Member States to exchange lessons learned in implementing national development strategies. The annual ministerial review combines a global review with thematic discussions and national voluntary presentations by countries on their progress in implementing the Goals.

24. The United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) brings together the executive heads of the funds, programmes and agencies of the United Nations system. Among other initiatives, since 2012, the CEB review of implementation of the Millennium Development Goals at the country level has sought to identify bottlenecks that prevent progress on lagging Goals in select countries and to identify multisectoral solutions through interactive dialogue among CEB members and relevant United Nations resident coordinators and World Bank country directors. Four Millennium Development Goals review rounds have taken place since 2012.

25. One of the three pillars of CEB, the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) and its Development Operations Coordination Office, provides the link between UNDG discussions at Headquarters and work at the United Nations country team level.[10]

26. The Secretary-General has submitted regular progress reports on the Millennium Development Goals to the General Assembly, and thematic reports on progress in 2005 and 2010.[11]

27. In 2002, the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Millennium Development Goal Indicators was established to compile global, regional and subregional aggregates. Since 2005, it has compiled the global monitoring data on the status of goals, targets and indicators for the annual Millennium Development Goals Reports and the Secretary-General's annual report on the work of the Organization. It has also sought to improve data and methodologies for the monitoring of the Goals (see E/2014/61, para. 107). The Inter-agency and Expert Group includes departments within the United Nations Secretariat, United Nations system entities, various intergovernmental agencies and national statisticians. Data are gathered by the international agencies in their respective areas of work from a variety of national sources, including national household surveys and administrative data and censuses. When data are not available, the responsible agencies produce estimates. Even when data are available, adjustments are often necessary to ensure comparability across countries. The Statistics Division has worked closely with the Inter-agency and Expert Group to maintain a global Millennium Development Goals Indicators Database. Data received are subjected to an internal validation programme prior to processing for annual updates of the database.

[9] See General Assembly resolutions 60/1 and 65/1.

[10] https://undg.org/home/about-undg/doco/ accessed 3 March 2015.

[11] A/57/270 and Corr.1, A/58/323, A/59/282 and Corr.1, A/68/202 and Corr.1 and A/69/201.

28. The availability of data needed to calculate the indicators in each country depends on the capacity of the national statistical services. To assist national statisticians and researchers, the Inter-agency and Expert Group has developed tools such as the handbook on indicators for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals. In March 2013, it reported on lessons learned from Millennium Development Goals monitoring, following a comprehensive review of its experiences at the global level.[12]

29. Some of the other sources of monitoring and evaluation information on the Millennium Development Goals include the MDG Achievement Fund, the Millennium Villages Project, the Global Partnership for Education and the World Bank's Global Monitoring Report. In May 2007, the Secretary-General created the Millennium Development Goals Gap Task Force to monitor progress contained in Millennium Development Goal 8, the Global Partnership for Development. The Task Force integrates key information produced by more than 30 United Nations and other international agencies. A Millennium Development Goals Gap Task Force report, tracking existing international commitments and progress towards achieving the targets set under goal 8, is published annually.[13]

Regional components

30. Numerous actors are involved in monitoring progress towards the Millennium Development Goals at the regional level and within regions. The regional commissions have assessed progress of countries towards the Goals and published the results in a multitude of regional Millennium Development Goals reports, organized numerous related intergovernmental forums and promoted regional partnerships. For example, ESCAP, in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank and UNDP, has produced a series of regional Millennium Development Goals progress reports that include coverage at the subregional and individual country levels. In the Arab region, ESCWA, in cooperation with the League of Arab States and regional United Nations agencies, has produced a series of Arab Millennium Development Goals reports covering both review of progress in implementation and policy analysis; this work has included advocacy (see E/ESCWA/OES/2013/2).

31. Additionally, ECA, ECE, ECLAC, ESCAP and ESCWA have been implementing a Development Account project on strengthening statistical and inter-institutional capacities for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals that aims to promote more up-to-date and comparable data. Within regions, the Regional Coordination Mechanism plays an important role in connecting the national, regional and global perspectives. As one example, in the ECE region the Regional Coordination Mechanism has a working group on efforts to improve and harmonize Millennium Development Goals monitoring and data availability at the country level. Furthermore, UNDP regional centres provide technical support and capacity-building to assess progress at the national level through country reports.

[12] "Lessons Learned from MDG Monitoring from a Statistical Perspective: Report of the Task Team on Lessons Learned from MDG Monitoring of the IAEG-MDG", March 2013.

[13] See, for example, *The State of the Global Partnership for Development: MDG Gap Task Force Report 2014*, United Nations publication, Sales No. E.14.I.7.

National components

32. UNDP, in conjunction with the United Nations country teams, has provided technical guidelines and financial assistance since 2001 in the preparation of over 450 nationally produced Millennium Development Goals country reports covering 161 countries. In the United Republic of Tanzania, for example, interviewees at national ministries indicated that these reports had fed into national development strategies and policy interventions. One interviewee said that the reports were in very high demand among policymakers, the international community, Government, researchers and academics. Some countries have produced as few as one report, while others have produced up to five. Albania, Brazil and Sri Lanka are among the countries that have also prepared Millennium Development Goals reports at the subnational level (see E/2014/61, para. 101).

Lesson 2: Clear monitoring and evaluation objectives, roles/responsibilities and coordination mechanisms need to be established at the outset

33. Establishment at the outset of clear monitoring and evaluation responsibilities is among the necessary conditions for effective monitoring and evaluation. In the case of the Millennium Development Goals, this constituted a lacuna in the original design. Arrangements evolved in an ad hoc manner. As noted in paragraph 22 above, the Secretary-General's road map outlined the earliest thinking on monitoring progress towards the Goals. It was not until 2002 that more in-depth discussions regarding responsibilities and collaboration for global reporting and analysis were initiated.[14] OIOS interviewees unanimously concurred that roles and responsibilities associated with monitoring and evaluation were not clearly assigned at the outset of the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals and had evolved in an ad hoc manner. To give just one example, on the basis of a review of OIOS documents as well as interviews with regional commission colleagues and their partners, all regional commissions have undertaken a variety of Millennium Development Goals-related monitoring and evaluation activities. Many of them have supported the strengthening of national statistical capacity and evidence-based policy development, including the reduction of discrepancies between global, national and local data sets. These initiatives have engaged numerous Regional Coordination Mechanism and Member State partners. At the same time, there remains a lack of clarity as to how these activities are intended to link to related global and national initiatives.

34. To achieve maximum impact from the significant work of United Nations global, regional and national entities, additional thought was needed on how independent programmes of work linked to an overarching monitoring and evaluation framework. Planning related to desired connections between related regional, national and global initiatives was also insufficient.

35. In the post-2015 era, it will be important for national, regional and global review efforts to be sufficiently linked, utilizing an overarching monitoring and evaluation framework. For example, the way in which regional commissions are utilized should be explicitly spelled out. In August and September 2014, the regional commissions led consultations on accountability in each of the five regions; these were extensive discussions which engaged a variety of regional stakeholders in

[14] United Nations System Task Team on the Post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda, "Statistics and indicators for the post-2015 development agenda", July 2013.

development agenda", support for national statistical services from international agencies and donor countries grew from $1 billion in 2006 to $2.3 billion from 2010 to 2012, with the European Commission, UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and the World Bank being the largest donors and Afristat, the OECD Paris21 initiative and the United Nations Statistics Division, among others, playing a key role. One OIOS survey respondent, echoing the comments of numerous interviewees, reported that "the Millennium Development Goals framework has led to an overall improvement of international (and national) statistics and wider reporting". Some respondents credit, in part, actions implemented under the 2004 Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics,[20] adopted at the Second International Roundtable on Managing for Development Results in 2004. At the same time, statistical capacities remain insufficient in many developing countries.[21] Moreover, some developing countries have reported concerns that the need to conduct targeted data collection for the Millennium Development Goals, and service international reporting obligations, has diverted resources away from domestic statistical priorities, thus undermining the goal of building national sustainable statistical capacity. According to the Inter-agency and Expert Group, "global targets were incorrectly interpreted as national, even sub-national targets, which distorted analysis, priority-setting and statistical development efforts in many countries".[22]

45. Looking ahead to the post-2015 era, more monitoring and evaluation investments are going to be required at the national as well as the international level to effectively monitor and evaluate the sustainable development goals. In the words of the Secretary-General, "we must significantly scale up support to countries and national statistical offices with critical needs for capacities to produce, collect, disaggregate, analyse and share data crucial to the new agenda" (see A/69/700, para. 142). UNDG has also recommended that the United Nations development system "intensify support to strengthening of national statistical capacity, greater disaggregation and 'localization' of national data and address all data 'dark spots', using the distinctiveness of the United Nations global footprint and the capacities and scope of the United Nations system's joint data coverage".[23] An important lesson learned involves the need for greater coordination in support of national

[20] www.worldbank.org/en/data/statistical-capacity-building/marrakech-action-plan-for-statistics accessed 3 March 2015.

[21] See report of the Task Team on Lessons Learned from Millennium Development Goal Monitoring of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Millennium Development Goal Indicators, "Lessons learned from MDG monitoring from a statistical perspective", March 2013; report of the Secretary-General for the 2014 annual ministerial review of the Economic and Social Council, entitled "Addressing ongoing and emerging challenges for meeting the Millennium Development Goals in 2015 and for sustaining development gains in the future" (E/2014/61); draft report of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network entitled "Indicators and a monitoring framework for sustainable development goals: launching a data revolution for the SDGs", January 2015; report of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals (A/68/670 and Corr.1), August 2014.

[22] "Lessons learned", ibid., p. 4.

[23] United Nations Development Group, "UNDG vision and framework for actions for UN operational activities in support of the post-2015 agenda: recommendations from the UNDG as a contribution to the CEB post-2015 'fit for purpose' discussions in November 2014", p. 3. Original emphasis.

statistical plans, as also envisaged by the Marrakech and Busan Action Plans for Statistics.[24]

46. The Open Working Group, in its report, proposed two targets directly related to data, monitoring and accountability to accompany sustainable development goal 17, "strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development": (a) "by 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries ... to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location ..."; and (b) "by 2030, build on existing initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement gross domestic product, and support statistical capacity-building in developing countries" (see A/69/970). While indicators to measure investments in data and monitoring have yet to be defined, the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, in a recent report, comprehensively laid out key considerations related to the development of a monitoring framework; both the role of national Governments and that of United Nations and partner institutions are emphasized.[25] In this regard, OIOS interviews and survey responses suggest that there may be a need for a new model for capacity development.

Lesson 6: Monitoring information needs to be sufficiently accessible

47. As indicated earlier, to be effective, monitoring and evaluation data need to be responsive to user demands, in terms of both providing information deemed useful and providing information that informs decision-making on performance improvement. Information on Millennium Development Goal indicators from United Nations system entities are presented in a range of reports: regional and country progress reports;[26] United Nations entity thematic flagship publications; the United Nations Millennium Development Goal Indicators database reports;[27] World Bank/International Monetary Fund Global Monitoring Reports; reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration; and the high-profile annual United Nations Millennium Development Goals Reports. A range of entities outside the United Nations system have also produced important information and analysis. While a wealth of Millennium Development Goals-related information exists for public consumption, there is demand for more knowledge-sharing, transparency and openness, as called for in principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development[28] and as underscored by the Secretary-General in his synthesis report (A/69/700), which calls for "remedying inequalities" in access to information.[29]

48. Looking ahead to the post-2015 era, a data revolution will bring demand for more and better data. The suggested sustainable development goals and indicators cover a wider range of issues than the Millennium Development Goals; at the same

[24] See "Statistics and indicators for the post-2015 development agenda" at note 14 above.

[25] See Sustainable Development Solutions Network, at note 21 above.

[26] www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/mdg/mdg-reports/ accessed February 2015.

[27] http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Default.aspx accessed February 2015.

[28] As also embedded in the ECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention), 1998.

[29] See also A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development: the report of the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, 2013; and A World that Counts, see note 17 above.

General Assembly resolution 69/237, in which the Assembly emphasized the importance of strengthening evaluation capacity at the national level. These resolutions all support bridging accountability and monitoring through the vehicle of evaluation and lessons learned, including applying lessons learned in programming processes.[37] For example, in paragraph 174 of its resolution 67/226, the Assembly requested the "funds and programmes and the specialized agencies to develop evaluation plans that are aligned with new strategic plans and are an integrated part of monitoring systems". OIOS interviewees corroborated that, in order to inform mid-course corrections to policies and development programmes, such data need to be complemented by periodic relevant, high-quality and independent evaluative analysis of the underlying causes associated with the up or down movement of monitoring indicators. This is also the message from the United Nations Evaluation Group.

57. The Secretary-General's synthesis report reiterated that review discussions on sustainable development goals should be public, participatory and broadly accessible and based on facts, data, scientific findings and evidence-based evaluations (see A/69/700, para. 149). Additionally, in the words of the regional commissions: "Voluntary evaluation helps to identify whether the right policies and actions are being pursued and, if not, points to the alternative directions to follow."[38]

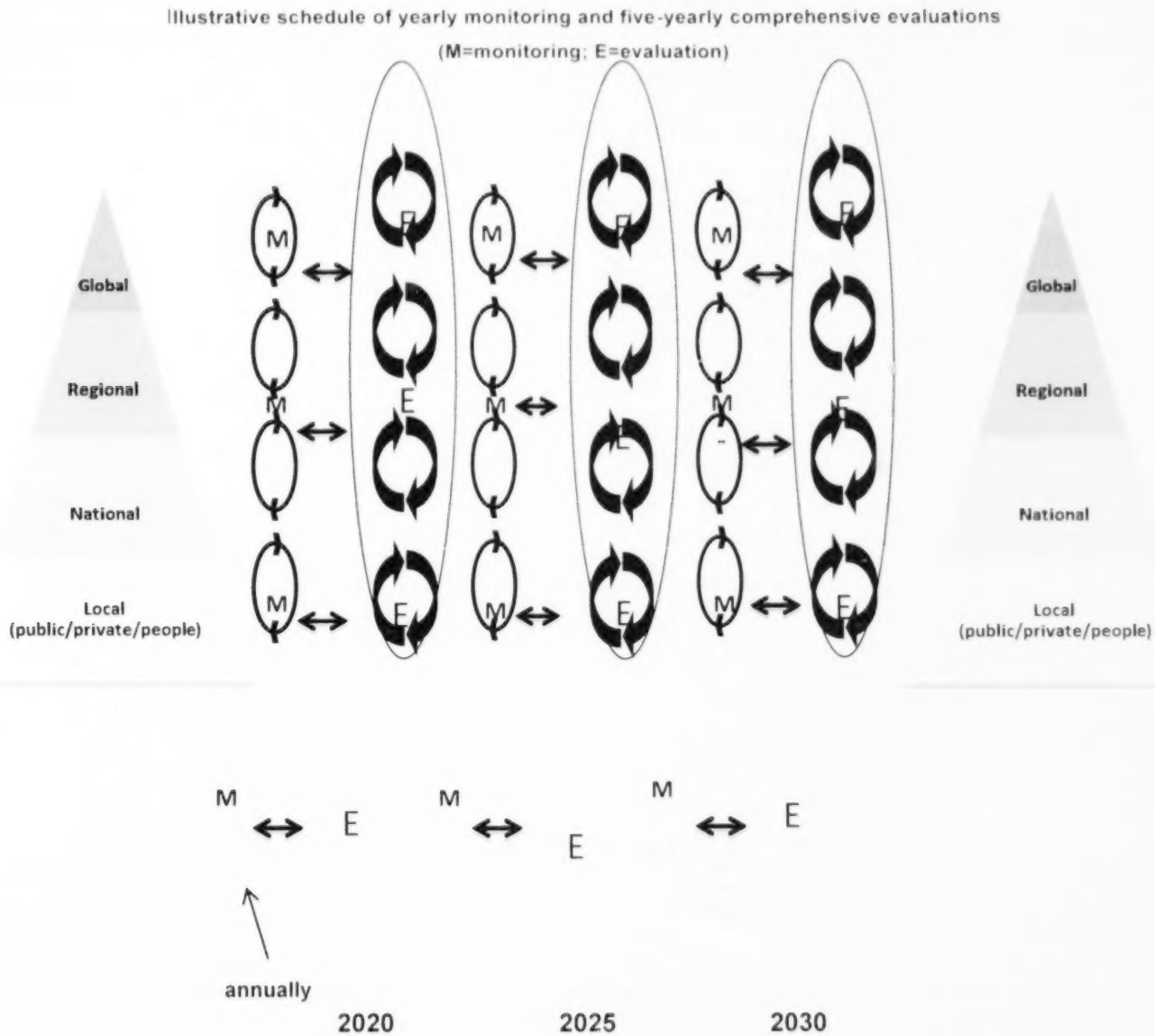
58. As noted above, the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Millennium Development Goal Indicators brought together statisticians from different organizations to share best practices in the area of monitoring. A similar role could be envisaged for evaluators. Because evaluation can function as a bridge between monitoring and accountability, explicit attention to evaluation planning in the overall architecture of the sustainable development goals warrants consideration, for example, assigning clear roles, responsibilities and resources to build evaluation capacity for systematic, cyclical input to decision-making by stakeholders involved at the global, regional and national levels.

59. OIOS suggests, in particular, specific junctures for evaluative reflection and reporting at the respective levels, as illustrated in figure IV. This figure highlights the possibility of a framework where annual monitoring and review, performed by a variety of entities and the engagement of a diverse group of stakeholders, feeds into some form of comprehensive evaluation report at, for example, five-year intervals. The underlying idea is the development of a monitoring and evaluation framework that integrates both the vertical and horizontal (or temporal) levels, to capture and disseminate digestible key lessons learned for use by decision makers seeking to implement evidence-based corrections in pursuit of effective achievement of the sustainable development goals.

[37] See also General Assembly resolutions 67/226, especially paragraphs 61 and 174; A/62/208, especially paragraph 118; and 59/250, especially paragraph 73.

[38] See "Towards an effective monitoring and accountability framework" at note 16 above.

Figure IV
Evaluation — Junctures of opportunity for learning and accountability



Lesson 8: When differences exist in stakeholder views of accountability, this becomes relevant in efforts to monitor and evaluate effectively

60. In connection with the discussion above, the logic outlined in the thematic impact pathway shows that the existence of an agreement on a United Nations accountability framework as well as the means to promote accountability and learning are fundamental to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. There needs to be sufficient agreement on who will do what monitoring and evaluation, for whose decision-making purposes and in support of which programme results.

61. In paragraph 8 of its resolution 64/259, the General Assembly defined accountability to include "achieving objectives and high-quality results in a timely and cost-effective manner, in fully implementing and delivering on all mandates to the Secretariat approved by the United Nations intergovernmental bodies and other subsidiary organs established by them".

62. OIOS stakeholder interviews, survey data and document review identified expectations that were more fluid. Stakeholder constituencies had a wide variety of perspectives on what Millennium Development Goal accountability should look like and the roles that different entities should play to achieve accountability. Furthermore, multiple interviewees told OIOS that the idea of "accountability" had not been framed clearly as a concept when the Goals were developed.

63. In relation to the post-2015 era, accountability issues have arisen as a focus area within discussions in the Open Working Group. Most recently, Member States agreed that the outcome document to be prepared for adoption at the United Nations summit to be convened in September 2015 may include follow-up and review. The Secretary-General's synthesis report includes a number of references to this intergovernmental dialogue (see A/69/700, paras. 56 and 93). In this regard, the Secretary-General has proposed for consideration a multi-layered, universal review process initiated at the country level and informing regional peer reviews and global-level reviews under the auspices of the high-level political forum on sustainable development (ibid., para. 149). In this context, OIOS offers the thematic impact pathway described in paragraph 13 above to assist decision makers as they determine what monitoring and evaluation structure for the sustainable development goals will be most useful in promoting utilization of lesson-learning along all paths as progress in the achievement of the goals is sought at the national, regional and global levels.

IV. Conclusion

64. Going forward, there can be little doubt that the opportunity exists to develop a more robust monitoring and evaluation framework for the sustainable development goals than what was applied to the Millennium Development Goals. Recent technical and intergovernmental discussions on the opportunities associated with the data revolution, a multi-tiered (national, regional and global) review framework and the further impetus given to the importance of evaluation in empowering decision makers all point in a useful direction. It is also fortunate that work performed by a multitude of United Nations entities to monitor and report on progress on the Millennium Development Goals offers valuable lessons from which to learn.

65. At the same time, there will be numerous challenges associated with putting in place an effective sustainable development goals monitoring and evaluation framework that is truly useful in measuring progress along the path to achievement of the goals by 2030. Given the universality of the sustainable development agenda and the commitment to national ownership, the associated monitoring and evaluation framework will need to incorporate a significant degree of flexibility, while simultaneously including sufficient means of coordination to allow for the desired degree of coherence. One or more mechanisms, backed by appropriate mandates, sufficient authority and considerable resources, will be needed to support statistical, monitoring and, increasingly, evaluation capacity development. While it is important to nurture the distinct characteristics and strengths of different professional fields, it will be crucial to minimize the potential for overlap. This will require the coordination of outputs that feed into decision-making processes relating to the sustainable development goals and the coordination of capacity-building, especially in the nascent area of evaluation.

66. In particular, a great opportunity exists to utilize evaluation as a bridge to contextualize monitoring data, identify root causes where achievement appears to be thwarted and increase the accessibility of evidence-based information for decision makers as well as other stakeholders. As a monitoring and evaluation framework is designed for the sustainable development goals, the specific ways in which evaluation can be utilized as a bridge will need additional consideration.

67. With the advantage of hindsight, the Millennium Development Goals experience illuminates the need to plan strategically beforehand. A well-thought-out, mutually agreed-upon monitoring and evaluation framework for the goals that produces useful, accessible outputs for interested stakeholders at the national, regional and global levels, both within and outside governmental entities, will be needed. This is a tall order. However, without such a framework, a tremendous number of opportunities will be missed to promote ownership, inform mid-course programme adjustments, provide evidence-based information for use in the context of the envisioned review processes and improve coordination and accountability.

V. Recommendation

Development of a coherent, coordinated sustainable development goals monitoring and evaluation plan to support Member State decision-making
(see paras. 22-63)

68. In conjunction with the upcoming summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda, the Secretary-General should formulate an overarching strategy and action plan to support coherent, coordinated monitoring and evaluation of achievement towards the sustainable development goals. The goal of this overarching plan should be to enable him to provide Member State decision makers with coherent, useful monitoring and evaluation information that can be utilized in mid-course correction-related decision-making on the sustainable development goals. Consideration should be given to the need for the following:

- A formal sustainable development goals monitoring and evaluation framework that promotes United Nations system-wide coherence

- Monitoring and evaluation information that can feed into Member State scheduled decision-making at the most timely and useful junctures
- Supporting national monitoring and evaluation capacity development
- A more structured and rigorous approach to evaluation, including as a means to synthesize monitoring and other data in a manner that responds to stakeholders' needs at the decision-making layers that apply to fulfilment of the prospective sustainable development goals.

Indicator of achievement: an overarching plan for monitoring and evaluation of the sustainable development goals is in place.

Annex

Comments from the Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General for Post-2015 Development Planning

The findings and recommendation of the OIOS report provide useful information for the ongoing discussions on the post-2015 development agenda.

The lessons from the Millennium Development Goals underscore the importance of: (a) the link between national, regional and global reviews and, in particular, the role of regional commissions in this regard; (b) comprehensive, coherent and robust data collection and analysis and the need for capacity-building as well as mobilizing efforts around the data revolution; (c) a multi-stakeholder approach in considering a monitoring and evaluation framework to promote ownership, coherence and effective use of the review processes; and (d) investing in effective, inclusive and accountable public institutions.

The universality of the post-2015 agenda will have implications for how monitoring and evaluation will be conducted. Incentives for all countries to participate in monitoring and review would be needed to promote evidence-based policymaking. Strengthening governance at all levels through enhanced transparency and capacity development would be required to implement effective monitoring and review mechanisms underpinned by meaningful evaluations.

(*Signed*) Amina J. **Mohammed**
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